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Collingwood's Idea of History:
The Development and Form of Historical

Timothy A. Martin
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Collingwood's Idea of History:

The Development and Form of Historical Inquiry

Introduction

History was long considered a somehow second-rate discipline, incapable of producing true knowledge like math or the hard sciences. Whether viewed as the handmaiden of theology in the Middle Ages or simply denied a place among the sciences by the latter-day positivists, history's independence and value as a study in its own right have been denied from many points of view at different times. R. G. Collingwood takes issue with this attitude towards history by asserting its autonomy both in subject and method in his The Idea of History. His inquiry into the nature of history is divided into two parts. The first is essentially historical, reviewing how historical studies, or the discipline of history, fared in Western thought from Herodotus to the 1930's. This first section aims at tracing the gradual emergence of a full-fledged, independent idea of history. The other part is more philosophical, taking up such questions as the value of history, what a uniquely historical study must consist of, and how to undertake such a study. Following Collingwood's organization, I will evaluate first the historical, then the philosophical questions.

Before beginning this analysis of his work, it might be useful to sketch Collingwood's positions and objectives, and give an indication of my aims. Collingwood divides the history of thought into three stages -- Grecian beginnings, the Middle Ages, and the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries -- each characterized by its preoccupation with a particular intellectual problem. The idea and practice of history was molded by the temper of each of these

eras, until the emergence of autonomous history in the nineteenth century¹ posed one of the central epistemological problems of the age.

My evaluation of these historical roots will revolve around comparisons of Collingwood's notions about the theory and practice of a particular time with a sample of the historical work of that time.

It is difficult to trace the development of anything without an idea of what precisely this development is leading up to. For Collingwood, history is an autonomous science in the same sense as physics or mathematics, because it is capable of producing knowledge of the same caliber as these disciplines. The conditions that history must meet to achieve this ideal are rather elegantly summarized in Collingwood's statement that "history should be (a) a science or an answering of questions; (b) concerned with human actions in the past; (c) pursued by the interpretation of evidence; and (d) for the sake of human self-knowledge."²

The philosophical second half of Collingwood's book is largely a more detailed working out of these four conditions. He covers topics ranging from the proper form for study of the human mind to the precise nature of historical evidence, with varying success. Some of his concerns are broadly theoretical, as he inquires into the nature of thought and knowledge, while others are of more immediate interest to historians, such as how to reason from historical evidence, or the role of imagination in historical narrative. The driving question throughout the *Epilegomena*, though, is how to achieve autonomy. Collingwood is concerned with establishing autonomy on two levels; for the discipline of history, and for its individual practitioners.

Rather than attempt to follow Collingwood's organization closely, a rather difficult task in this somewhat patched-together section, I will take up

the basic question of historical autonomy. The more abstract issues of mind and knowledge will be slighted to provide a sharper focus on the practical implications of his theoretical search for autonomy. Specifically, his attempt to distinguish history from the natural sciences will be examined to see how he highlights, and distorts, fundamental features of history. Collingwood's attempt to devise a theoretically pure method for doing history will be scrutinized with an eye to how he runs afoul of practical realities.

Historical Inquiry

The first truly historical work was done in fifth century Greece by Herodotus. Prior to his work, writing about the past is best characterized as myth or legend, and exemplified by Homer or the anonymous Sumerians who carved the deeds of the gods in stone. This creation of true history by a fifth-century Greek is made all the more remarkable by the strongly anti-historical tendencies of Greek thought. The Greek conception of knowledge was based on the idea of the eternal, for only that which is unchanging can be truly known. All else is mere changable illusion and is thus too indeterminate to merit the label of knowledge. The Greek preoccupation with mathematics is symptomatic of this view of knowledge, for mathematical truths are abstract and timeless, true everywhere and always. More mundane matters of empirical fact, which are always changing, count only as opinion. On this view, history is clearly excluded from the realm of knowledge, for it is an account of what has passed and is no more. Its subject-matter is by definition transitory, and so can produce only opinion, not knowledge.

Nonetheless, the Greeks did place some value on history. They saw history as useful for the very practical reason that the lessons of the past

can be put to good use in today's affairs. It is useful only as opinion, though, for history produces accounts of unique and transitory events, not the eternal truths that are the stuff of knowledge.

Herodotus produced his *Histories* within this hostile environment. Collingwood claims that his work is a true scientific history, for reasons that shall be examined shortly. He does not make clear how Herodotus's contemporaries viewed his work. Did they, like Collingwood, consider his method sufficiently rigorous to extract knowledge from illusion? Apparently not, since his ideas withered away soon after his death, and he did not create an ongoing tradition or school of historians. From the classical Greek's point of view, then, not even Herodotus's *History* was scientific, since its very subject matter was in principle incapable of producing the eternal truths that are the hallmark of knowledge.

From Collingwood's vantage in the early twentieth century, though, Herodotus was a truly scientific historian because he met each of the four conditions for scientific history in Collingwood's definition. The first two conditions, that history be a science concerned with human actions in the past, were met by Herodotus as he made the transition from legend-writing to history. His work is a primarily humanistic inquiry into the causes and course of the Persian wars. He meets the fourth condition, that history be done for the sake of human self-knowledge, by stating in his introductory sentence that his purpose is to "preserve from decay the re-
³
 membrance of what men have done".

His real accomplishment, though, is his application of a critical method to his sources, for this is what truly elevates his work to the level of scientific history by meeting Collingwood's third condition that evidence be

interpreted. Herodotus did not blindly copy the eyewitness narratives that were his raw material. Instead, he cross-examined his witnesses, thus expanding and interpreting their testimonial evidence to create a fuller, less distorted picture of past events than unaided memory could produce.⁴ Even though this method is quite successful in Herodotus's hands, it is limited because the only material available to it must be in living memory. As a result, it limits the Greek historical perspective to relatively recent events. Within these limits, though, Collingwood is satisfied to call Herodotus a scientific historian because of his critical approach to his sources.⁵

Herodotus did not simply repeat what his sources told him, as a credulous chronicler. He was aware, for instance, of the different sides to the story of how the Persian Wars began, and contrasts the Persian and Phoenecian versions almost immediately.⁶ He is compelled by his critical attitude to acknowledge when the facts do not settle these conflicting accounts.⁷ If one source seems more reliable, Herodotus alerts the reader to this fact and to his reasons for believing so.⁸ Where an account does seem implausible, as when Croesus is alleged to have drained the river Halys to gain passage for his armies, he expresses the reasons for his skepticism.⁹ He is careful to disassociate himself somewhat from the more fantastic stories that he tells, as with "in his time a wonderful thing is said to have happened"¹⁰. This is not to say that Herodotus is completely objective, for he is still an ancient Greek, and so speaks matter-of-factly about such things as prophets being moved by divine impulse.¹¹

Undoubtedly, Herodotus was a careful thinker, aware of the limitations of his sources and methods and not afraid to alert the reader to them. It

is remarkable that he could do as much as he did in the adverse intellectual climate of ancient Greece. Collingwood's treatment of him is therefore understandably sympathetic, but should be taken with a grain of salt. His account of the historical method used by Herodotus sounds quite factual, full of "quite clearly's" and "must haves"¹². In fact, though, it is speculation, if rather solidly grounded speculation. This is unfortunate, because Collingwood attaches a great deal of importance to this method, claiming that it enabled Herodotus to create knowledge where there was none before¹³. For Collingwood, such knowledge is achieved by interpreting evidence, and it is not clear that his speculative account of Herodotus's techniques is adequate to justify calling what Herodotus produced knowledge.

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A long decline set in after the deaths of Herodotus and his follower Thucydides. Writing about the past descended into legend-writing and chronicles of what various authorities had to say about history. It was not until the ideas of Christianity began to take hold and Christian scholarship developed in the early Middle Ages that the idea of history began to develop again. This Christian influence is the distinguishing feature of the second of Collingwood's three eras in the history of thought. Unfortunately his treatment of medieval and Renaissance history is extremely sketchy and general, making this section the weakest in the book. I will examine the works of Bede and Machiavelli to fill in this gap in his historical inquiry, and use their histories as a standard against which to measure Collingwood's generalities.

According to Collingwood, the Christian worldview fundamentally altered Greek notions about the theory of history, even though there was no real advance in method until after the Middle Ages. He sees this "leaven of Christian ideas" contributing much that is essential to modern history. He pin-

points two basic Classical assumptions about man and the world that Christianity replaced.

The first of these assumptions has to do with human nature and the nature of human action and achievement. For the Greeks, man was a rational agent who perceived what ends were desirable and exerted his will to attain them. If he failed, he had "missed his mark", either through such incidental agencies as the intervention of an outside force or because of some character flaw of his own. Christianity took this inability to achieve chosen ends as a natural, permanent part of the human condition and explained it with the concepts of sin and grace. Human actions are not driven by intellectually conceived and rationally chosen ends, but by blind desire. This desire not only leads us into sin, but is the "inherent and original sin proper to our nature". That which man does achieve is done because it is part of God's plan. It is through His grace that our desires and efforts are channelled¹⁴ towards His constructive ends .

According to Collingwood, this doctrine produced tremendous gains for history, as it allows the historian to see that what happens is not necessarily a direct product of anyone's will or "deliberately wishing it to happen"¹⁵ .

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At best, though, the Christian analysis cleared the ground for a better realization of the role of circumstance and accident in history, since it is apparent that Herodotus was aware of these forces in his History. Certainly the medieval historians interpretation of this doctrine made history a play written by God, with events thus being ascribed to Providence. As Collingwood later recognizes¹⁶ , this is something of a backward step, eliminating as it does the humanist nature of Greek history. While it may have served to allow later historians to see an internal logic of events, this

first Christian idea seems initially to have been something of a mixed blessing.

The Greek substantialist notions about eternal entities that underly history but are untouched by historical change were also undermined by Christianity. Herodotus is not particularly guilty of substantialism, since he was interested in events as important in themselves. Later Greco-Roman though, however, was increasingly interested in events only to the extent that they illuminated these eternal substances. Livy, for instance, wrote a history of Rome that was not an account of how Rome developed and came to be, but rather viewed Rome as a changeless entity that was complete at the beginning of his history¹⁷

Christianity rejected this view, holding that only God was eternal and all else was His creation, subject to fundamental changes through His Grace. The will of God may be manifested through what the Greeks would term the accidents alter and form the substance. This allows historical processes to create and destroy things, so that Greece and Rome are quite properly seen as the products of history, not its pre-suppositions¹⁸

In addition to these two main points, Collingwood notes other characteristics of modern history, including its apocalyptic bent and tendency to periodize, that can be traced to Christian influences. Like the second fundamental theoretical shift, these are relatively unproblematic, but he seems to run into trouble when he talks about universalism as a product and characteristic of Christian historiography¹⁹

As with Providential history, Collingwood seems overoptimistic, as the best that can be said is that Christianity left room for such cosmopolitan histories, but by no means compelled them. In practice, medieval historians seem, at the very least, no less subject to provincialism than classical historians.

Bede wrote his History of The English Church and People in the eighth century, and it has since become an oft-cited example of medieval historical work. It is typical of such histories in many ways, written as it was by a ^{monk} priest in conformity with the accepted ideas of the day, but it is set apart from many monastical histories by its clarity of writing and quality of thought.

Nonetheless, Bede's history exhibits the greatest flaw of medieval thought, a credulity that is at least partially rooted in the lack of a critical method for gathering and interpreting evidence. As Bede describes his work, it is a chronicle, or collation of relevant portions of other works ²⁰. His primary authority was an Abbot Albinus, who along with other churchmen passed information that they "considered worthy of mention" along to Bede. He gives no indication that he did anything but accept their information uncritically.

As a result, the book contains a great number of fantastic stories. For instance, he tells us quite matter-of-factly that St. Albans stopped a river by prayer, providing an interesting contrast to Herodotus' skeptical treatment of Croesus and the river Halys ²¹. Multiplying examples would be tedious since as an ecclesiastical history it is full of saint's lives and miracles that seem incredible to modern ears, though they were unquestioned during Bede's day.

but this fall as much as the mortal sin of the penitent

As Collingwood indicates, medieval histories tended to be Providential history. Bede's work bears out this assertion by placing God firmly at the center of the historical drama. The depredations of the invading Angles in the fifth century are characterized as God's judgment on the sins of the nation. Vortigern's decision to invite the Angles into Britain to settle is thus explained only as "ordained by God as a punishment". When they were finally defeated, it was not because of inferior leadership, or overextended supply

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lines, but because the Britons had regained God's help. This narrative reveals the flaw of Providential history, for it becomes unnecessary to inquire very deeply into the human reasons that underlay the twist and turn of events when such a ready explanation is at hand.

Collingwood's assertion that medieval historiography promotes universalism, or the writing of histories without a center of gravity, is not supported by Bede's work. Its title alone indicates that it is not a universal history, but is centered on England. More importantly, it is an ecclesiastical history, revolving almost entirely around the doings and development of the Church, which provides, in Collingwood's terms, "a particularistic center of gravity", an idea supposedly supplanted by Christian ideas. This provincialism is particularly evident in the accounts of the establishment of the Church, where no details of pre-Christian beliefs are given, and if they are described at all, are labelled as devil worship. Quite simply, anyone not a Christian is a pagan, and no more need be said, from Bede's point of view. This is hardly a cosmopolitan or universalist attitude.

Christian vision of universalism

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Collingwood rather offhandedly notes that the Renaissance historians overcame the central problems of medieval historiography by returning to humanist values and by prizing scholarship and factual accuracy.

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It is therefore remarkable that he devotes only a little over a page to this revolution in historical thought, and gives no examples to speak of.

Machiavelli's History of Florence largely bears out Collingwood's generalizations about Renaissance contributions to the theory and practice of history. Machiavelli makes clear his humanist orientation in the opening section where he demonstrates a concern for natural events and human actions as the explanation for historical happenings.

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At the beginning of

Book V he seeks explanations in the internal logic of human affairs rather than placing them out of reach in the Grace of God²⁶. He reduces religion to the same plane as other human activities, tracing St. Benedict's success in preserving Rome from barbarian depredations to his earthly reputation for sanctity, not to any action, direct or not, of God's²⁷. As Collingwood predicts, he is concerned with scholarship and factual accuracy, giving elaborate lists of adherents to various factions in Florentine politics, and taking great care in attempting to discover the true origin of the name Florentia²⁸. Machiavelli was not a scrupulous scholar, though, as some of his facts do seem unexamined. He blithely quotes a figure of 200,000 killed during a certain battle, for instance²⁹. Again, this is in line with Collingwood's remarks on the Renaissance historian's lack of any method³⁰ for doing research or reconstructing history. Indeed, Machiavelli's other works demonstrate little real awareness of methodological problems.

In Chapter 15 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli mentions that his method differs from that of others who have written on political history because he is concerned with the truth, not with constructing ideal states³¹. While *The Prince* is not a work of history per se, it does draw heavily on history to teach its lessons in statecraft. For Machiavelli as for Herodotus, then, history should be studied for its practical lessons, a view he states explicitly in the opening of his *Discourses on Livy*³². As Collingwood indicates, though, these inklings of history's purpose and uniqueness do not result in methodological insights. In fact, Machiavelli repeatedly notes Livy's practice of putting speeches into the mouths of his subjects, but never criticizes it and in one place even speaks of this practice with appro-

al . In short, serious methodological inquiry and criticism do not show themselves in Machiavelli. However, caution should be exercised in generalizing to all of Renaissance Italy from this one writer.

The seventeenth century opened the third of Collingwood's periods in the history of thought with Bacon's and Descartes' work on the epistemological problems of the natural sciences. Descartes' work in particular was a setback for the idea of autonomous history, for like the Greeks he held that history cannot produce knowledge. His criterion for truth, the clear and distinct idea, was admirably suited for confirming the worth of the exact sciences. Descartes charged that history is incapable of describing past events exactly as they happened, since it must always edit some things out in order to carry on its narrative. Its ideas are thus indistinct, and incapable of meeting his criteria for knowledge. The net result is that history may be interesting and instructive, but it is not scientific. However, many historians took Descartes ideas as a challenge to improve their methods, in order to be able to craft ideas that are more clear and distinct .

Giambattista Vico's The New Science was aimed at resurrecting history and providing it with an articulate method. In reply to Descartes, Vico adopted a new criterion for knowledge, called the verum-factum doctrine, which held that to truly know something, as opposed to merely perceiving it, the knower must have made it himself .

This doctrine preserves the paramount place of mathematics as a source of knowledge, which was important to the rationalists, and simultaneously elevates history to the same level of certainty. The subject-matter of history, the actions of men, is eminently suited for scientific study under the verum-factum doctrine. Vico showed that the distinction between ideas and facts that lay

at the root of Descartes' skepticism simply could not apply in history, because there are no historical facts that do not exist in the minds of men as ideas³⁸. History as both phenomenon and discipline is made by men, so there is no appeal beyond this human point of view to the "facts". Vico, having thus laid the general philosophical groundwork for history, was in a position to establish a method for acquiring historical knowledge.

He enumerates three broad principles that underly history and allow the extension of historical knowledge by analogy from familiar periods to those that are more obscure. Certain periods of history, such as Homeric Greece and the Middle Ages, share a general character revealed in similar governments, economies, arts, and so on. Further, these periods fall into a cycle and recur in the same order. This cycle is not circular, though, but spiral, as each period is a unique, particular phase of history that never repeats itself³⁹.

Vico also indicates several common sources of error in historical work, which include prejudices stemming from national pride or in favor of the period one studies, among others⁴⁰. Finally, he enlarged the range of sources on which an historian may draw, adding mythology, linguistics, and custom to the arsenal of sources available to the historian.⁴¹⁴²

Collingwood, in his eagerness to set history back on its proper course, distilled all of these progressive elements from Vico. In so doing, however, he neglects Vico's regressive tendency to resurrect the fallacies of medieval historiography that the Renaissance historians overcame. There can be no denying a humanist strain in Vico's thought, but it coexists with a tendency to fall back on divine providence as the underlying scheme on which history is built. He states that history "must be a rational civil theology of divine providence"⁴³. In so saying, he was not merely pointing out that much of

history goes against the designs and intentions of men. Vico's Providence⁴⁴ is composed of omnipotence, infinite wisdom and immeasurable goodness

The ultimate responsibility for history lies with a divinity, not man. Similarly, Vico lapses at time into a credulity that is quite reminiscent of the Middle Ages. He proposes, for instance, "invincible proofs that the Hebrews were the first people in our world and that in the sacred history they have accurately preserved their memories from the very beginning of the world"⁴⁵ or that, "giants...existed in nature among all the first gentile nations" .

One further point, recognized by Collingwood, denies any image of Vico as the modern father of scientific history. He, like Herodotus, founded no continuing tradition. His work was lost or ignored by his contemporaries as irrelevant, because the central concern of his era was with working out the bases and methods of the natural sciences. (I) shall pick up the thread of Collingwood's narrative at the end of the nineteenth century as we consider the final challenge that the natural sciences posed to autonomous history in the form of positivism.

There was, of course, a great deal of work done during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on the problems of history, an era that Collingwood terms the ~~Threshold~~ of Scientific History. However destructive the arguments of this era may have been of prior misconceptions about the nature of history, their constructive elements were either incomplete or misguided. The works of Hegel and Marx are particularly illustrative of this era because they synthesized and built on the advances of their predecessors while simultaneously making errors that are typical of the positivist position.

Hegel's Philosophy of History is valuable as a summation and synthesis of the historical thought of prior historical thinkers ranging from

Kant to Herder. Collingwood isolates five ideas in Hegel that represent⁴⁶ the main advances in historical thinking of this "pre-scientific" era .

First, Hegel distinguishes nature and history on the grounds that nature is strictly cyclical, each sunrise being identical to the last, while history travels in spirals, each recurrence made unique by the acquisition of something new. In fact, evolution theory blurs this sharp line in some cases, but the distinction can be saved on methodological grounds once it is realized that only an historian reenacts in his mind the causes of the events that he is studying. Following this, and secondly, all history is the history of thought, for actions can be understood, as opposed to merely observed, only as the outward expression of thought. Thirdly, the driving force of history is a very peculiar kind of reason that is perhaps better characterized as mind because it incorporates passionate and irrational elements. Fourthly, history is logical in that apparently disparate events are expressions of thought that form a logically connected chain behind the events. Finally, he maintained that history ends with the present for the simple reason that nothing else has yet happened, so that there is no evidence on future events for the historian to interpret.

This much of Hegel's work is constructive. However, Hegel along with Marx made crucial errors that prevent their ideas of history from being fully autonomous. Each wished to reduce the wide scope of history to one small segment, Hegel finding explanations for everything in politics, Marx in economics. For them, history is not an autonomous fabric woven of independent threads of art, religion, politics and so on, but is dependent on politics or economics, all else being reflections of these.

Hegel at least made history autonomous to the extent that it relied on

nothing beyond the logical necessity derived from the mind that drives it.

Marx made an additional retrogressive move, though, by reasserting the principle that historical events have natural causes. This is a positivistic move, where positivism "is defined as philosophy acting in the service of natural science"⁴⁷. Marx in effect asserts that, since historical

causes are natural, they will submit to examination by methods appropriate to the natural sciences. History is thus made subordinate to the natural sciences. It is assumed that only the natural sciences' claim to knowledge is legitimate, so if historians want to create knowledge, they must use natural science methods.⁴⁸

The last three authors to be considered can best be understood as operating in this positivistic environment. Two of them, Toynbee and Spengler, found it congenial, while Croce reacted against it. The positivist philosophers were concerned mainly with natural science, being convinced that only it could produce knowledge. When approaching history they tended to assimilate historical processes to the natural ones that hard science techniques were best suited to deal with. This assimilation both increased the reputability of history and destroyed its autonomy by making it seem that natural science methods were appropriate for historical studies. This method was simple; one ascertains the facts, then formulates general laws to account for them. Fortunately, historians had by this time developed a secure method of their own for finding facts, philological criticism, that can be traced to Vico through Hegel and Herder. Thus, they did not completely accept the natural science methodology pressed on them by the positivists, although they did concede some crucial points. Historians allowed their view of their subject-matter to be altered, Historical facts became separate or atomic entities, thus chopping up the field of history

into an infinity of independent facts. Like the scientific facts they were modeled on, these historical facts existed independently of the historian, who also acquired a scientific duty to eliminate all value judgements from his thinking. History was reduced to an account of external events and made incapable of looking at the thought out of which such events grow.

With these general principles in mind, the influence of positivism on distinguished British scholar Arnold J. Toynbee's work in the first volume of his Study of History can be seen. First, the advantageous effect of positivism must be noted. At the level of atomized, individual facts, Toynbee is impeccable and apparently displays a real mastery of a broad range of material. This follows very naturally from the positivist approach to history as a universe of discrete facts to be collected by historians. At the level of organization and general principles, though, the problems inherent in applying natural science thinking to historical questions becomes evident.

Toynbee is very concerned with breaking the human experience down into comparable parts called societies and civilizations. He pursues a study of the external relations between one society and another, such as Western Christendom and the Classical Greeks. This too is in line with the natural science approach to questions, which demands the dispassionate comparison of commensurable phenomena so that an inductively valid pattern or general law may be derived. The unsuitability of this approach for history is indicated by the way that Toynbee must belabor his historical subjects to fit them into his categories. The most extreme example of the way his approach distorts history is his treatment of the Roman Empire. It was too closely related to Greece to be considered a separate civilization in its own right, so he is forced by his model of history to consider it a phase in the decline of Hellenism. The sort

of rigid pigeonholing that he uses destroys the continuity of the historical process.

Toynbee is interested in the external relations between discrete units, since this is the only part of history susceptible to a positivist approach. History is too amorphous, too full of interdependency and continuity for much to be gained by such an approach. For Toynbee, a civilization cannot evolve into a new form of itself; when it changes, then it ceases to be itself and becomes a new civilization. Unfortunately, the Romans present a gray area that will not fit neatly into either of two pigeonholes, so he edits away the creative aspect of Rome to make it fit.

Collingwood sees the naturalistic view as fundamentally wrongheaded for an additional reason. For Toynbee, as for a scientists, the subject of study is a spectacle to be observed. Thus, he can never penetrate to the real subject-matter of history, its internal aspect of thought as that which drives and explains the external events. This thought cannot be understood unless the historian internalizes it and, in Collingwood's phrase, reenacts it in his own mind. Toynbee, by closely following the positivist notion of what facts are and how they should be handled, is blinded to this most important aspect of history⁵⁰

Oswald Spengler's *Decline of The West* illustrates the dangers inherent in the other half of the positivist method, that purports to formulate general laws governing the course of history. True scientific laws are predictive, on the principle that if all past cases can be subsumed under a certain formula, then all future cases can be reliably predicted by that formula. As Spengler applies this to history, there is no interpretation of events and thought, but only subsumption of occurrences under his grand historical scheme.

Spengler's work takes to extremes many of the positivist elements that can also be found in Toynbee's writing. Like Toynbee, he saw history as made up of distinct civilizations. However, he regarded them as monads, isolated from one another. The analogy that drives his thought makes civilizations behave much like organisms, a very compatible notion to a positivist. Each society has clearly defined stages of growth, maturity and decay that are precisely comparable to the stages in the life-cycle of other societies. Spengler was not interested in doing history. He wanted to construct a morphology of history that eliminates the unique, the accidental, the transitory, in short the progressive nature of history in favor of a structure of forms that can be captured by general laws. Like true scientific laws, his scheme of history claims to have predictive power. To gain this power, though, like Toynbee he must ignore the internal side of history, the thoughts of which events are merely expressions. Spengler handled the evidence presented by these events in a profoundly unhistorical way. He did not interpret it in an effort to gain knowledge of the lives and thoughts of men, but tried to extract a general law from it to graph the coming decline of the West.

The Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce presents a sharp contrast to Toynbee and Spengler. Collingwood places him at the pinnacle of European thought on history because he finally established the autonomy of history after the millenia-long struggle. Not surprisingly, they have much in common.

Croce's work on the idea of history began with an 1894 essay dealt with history as a kind of art, in direct opposition to the trend toward subjugating history to natural science. He defined art as representing, as a part of what is possible, an intuitive vision of individuality. In contrast, science is knowledge of the general, as it tries to organize facts under general laws.

Since it narrates the real, a subset of the possible, and is concerned with individuals and not generalities, history can be considered a very peculiar kind of art

The distinctions between history and nature, and history and science, were elaborated in some of Croce's later work. For him, natural science was made up of thought about pseudo-concepts, constructions that are artificial because they are either frankly abstract, as in the concept of a triangle, or are empirical terms for grouping phenomena that could be grouped in other ways with equal truth, as in the concepts of cat or rose. The value of natural science is practical, for it teaches us not to understand reality, but to manipulate it. For Croce, nature was an ambiguous term, both real and unreal. If by nature we mean individual events, then it is real, but it is also synonymous with, or at least a part of history. If we mean a system of abstract laws, then we are speaking of nature as a pseudo-concept which we use to organize those individual facts. Croce has performed the remarkable feat of reversing the positivist positions of science and history. Under his scheme, natural science is dependent on history, for the scientific work cannot begin until the historical work is done.

Having dealt with natural science, Croce turned to philosophy as a threat to historical autonomy. Hegel's scheme to impose a philosophical history on top of ordinary history, as though ordinary history were not reflective and philosophical embodies. Croce held that philosophical knowledge is already part of history and is contained in the universal, and universally shared, concepts that inform historical judgments. Philosophy thinks through the meanings, concepts, and language through which we view and interpret the events of the past. Again, Croce turned the tables on previous thinkers by making

history necessary for philosophy. His position holds history to be "the concrete thought of which philosophy is only the methodology of history."

Croce's final position on history thus fully establishes its autonomy, allowing it to carry on in its own way for its own reasons. The conception of history that results from these arguments bears some looking at, since it is very close to the one Collingwood defends in his philosophical *Epilegomena*. Properly conceived, history is contemporary history in the sense that it is not captured by mere documents, but "lives only as a present interest and pursuit in the mind of the historian" as he does history. The essential condition for historical knowledge is that past events must be reenacted in the historian's mind when the evidence for them is present and intelligible to him. History can thus be distinguished from chronicle, which is "the past as merely believed upon testimony but not historically known" or genuinely internalized and understood. This in turn enables a final distinction between evidence and testimony. Both are artifacts left by the past. It is how they are viewed and used that distinguishes the two. Testimony is accepted at face value. Evidence exists only when those artifacts are "interpreted on critical principles". The essence of doing history lies in applying critical principles to evidence. 51

Collingwood's historical inquiry concludes with Croce, whose ideas are very similar to his own. This inquiry, as I have tried to show, is not without its flaws. If there is a common thread underlying the various problems in Collingwood's account, it stems from his theoretical turn of mind. He wants to show the development of history as orderly and unbroken progress, obscuring the fitful, three steps forward one step back progress that it seems actually to have made. He sometimes emphasizes the advances of various schools of thought at

the cost of presenting clearly their failings. His section on Vico, which glosses over the anachronisms in his New Science that show the resilience of medieval thought and the sallowness of the Renaissance influence, is the clearest example of this tendency. While this turn of Collingwood's mind leads to some distortion, it is by no means a fatal flaw. The account that he gives of the course that the idea of history has followed seems generally accurate. It would be advisable, though, to keep this overly theoretical tendency of Collingwood's in mind as we approach his philosophical inquiry.

Philosophical Inquiry

The Epilegomena in Collingwood's The Idea of History is a philosophical, analytic look at several aspects of the historical enterprise. It can be seen as a detailed exposition of his four-part definition of history, which bears repeating here. Collingwood claims that "history should be (a) a science, or an answering of question; (b) concerned with human actions in the past; (c) pursued by interpretation of evidence and; (d) for the sake of human self-⁵² knowledge".

My focus will be somewhat narrower than his because I will concentrate on certain aspects of parts a,b, and c of his definition, and not address part d at all. The more metaphysical questions about the nature of mind, the value of history, and his broader epistemological concern with the nature of knowledge will be slighted in favor of a more practical orientation. Questions of more immediate interest to a practicing historian will be addressed, including what the criterion of historical truth might be, and what sources and evidence are and how they should be handled.

Collingwood's concern with autonomy is prominent throughout the Epilego-

mena, as it drives his inquiry and informs his conclusions. He attempts to achieve disciplinary autonomy by establishing the separation of history and the natural sciences, and then makes a less successful attempt to establish the autonomy of the individual historian. These interrelated concerns underly the practical questions of historical method.

One of the first milestones in Collingwood's pursuit of autonomy is his establishment once and for all of a distinction between history and natural science. This may seem peculiar, in light of his definition of history as "(a) a science". However, he was not construing the term "science" as a shorthand label for natural science. Indeed, he derided such narrow constructions as "slang usage", and opted for a more inclusive definition of science as "an organized body of knowledge"⁵³. History, however, is organized differently from natural science. His discussion is in many ways an extension of Croce's thought on the same subject. Collingwood essentially sets out two ways that history and natural science differ. The first distinction is found in the type of inference used, and the second in the object of their inquiries.

What is "inference"? To Collingwood, it is a term that includes much, for to say that a body of knowledge is organized is to say that it is inferential.

The practitioner of any science is not allowed to claim that he knows something unless and until he can justify that claim by demonstrating the grounds on which it is made. This demonstration is the inference of the conclusion from its premisses and it is what organizes the body of knowledge.

What distinguishes historical from other types of scientific inference? The exact sciences of geometry and mathematics use deductive inference. Its chief characteristic is that it has a kind of "logical compulsion" where once the initial assumptions are accepted, e.g. a straight line the shortest dis-

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tance between two points, then the conclusion follows inevitably. The other, observational and experimental sciences use inductive inference, in which general patterns are constructed from particular observations, as one "proceeds from the particular to the universal". Inductive conclusions are "proven" only in a relatively weak sense of the word, as they do not compel a certain conclusion, but only give permission to see it.

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However, history remains indistinguishable from the observational and experimental sciences, since all three are non-deductive. It can be readily distinguished from these natural sciences on the basis of what counts for an observation in each discipline. In the experimental sciences, observations are of events made to happen under controlled conditions, something simply not possible in historical studies. Similarly, observational scientists rarely accept the observations of others, but go and make observations themselves, though historians can never directly observe the events they study. These sciences can also be distinguished from history on the basis of their aims. Natural scientists make observations in order to "detect the constant or recurring features in events of a certain kind". To use Collingwood's example, meteorologists study cyclones to compare them to other cyclones with the aim of discovering which features are recurring, or "to find out what cyclones are like". His inference is inductive, for it proceeds from particular cyclones to general laws about cyclonic behavior. The historian's aim in studying a particular war is not necessarily to make generalizations about, and certainly not to formulate scientific laws governing, wars. More likely, he aims at placing that war in the context of human activity in which it occurred.

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Is this induction? It seems not, though Collingwood does not directly address the question. The historian does not proceed from the particular to the

universal, but rather from one particular to the next, while considering each an embodiment of more general tendencies or traits. There are no in-violate, universal laws in history, for it is a human activity, and men are always redefining and changing the rules.

Another approach to the difference between history and the natural sciences is to examine the object of their study. The key to this approach is rather obliquely alluded to in part (b) of Collingwood's definition of history as "concerned with human actions in the past". History is concerned with actions, observational science with mere events. The distinction between an action and an event arises because actions are two-dimensional, with an inside and an outside, but events have only an outside.

Collingwood defines the outside of an action as "everything belonging to it that can be described in terms of bodies and their movements", while its inside is "that in it which can only be described in terms of thought". In his example of an historical action, Caesar crossing the Rubicon, the outside is Caesar's crossing of the river, while its inside is his defiance of Republican law. An historian is interested in both dimensions. His work will most likely begin with the outside of the action, but he is not finished until he has penetrated into the action and "discerned the thought of the agent". The true ob-
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ject of historical study is this thought, for it is what explains events.

Occurrences in nature are mere events, with no inside dimension. The natural scientist, like the historian, does not stop with the mere discovery of the event. Instead of penetrating into its inside, though, the natural scientist goes beyond the event, to discover its relation to other events and subsume it under a scientific law. The historian moves in the opposite direction, Colling-

wood claims, by penetrating into the event. However, this is correct only to the extent that the historian's task is limited to discovering the agent's thought. Frequently, though, historians also go beyond the action at hand and relate it to other actions, for how else is the significance of an act to be determined? Caesar may have been rebelling against Republican law in crossing the Rubicon, but both that event and his intentions can have very little significance if not placed in the context of Roman history. Though Collingwood's account may be incomplete in this way, he does make his point of distinguishing history from the natural sciences by way of their object.

Collingwood's metaphor of the inside and outside of actions is of considerable importance for his entire theory of historical understanding, and so merits close scrutiny. In the first place, he is not entirely consistent in his use of the metaphor. When introduced "outside" seems to refer entirely to the physical action or bodily movements of the agent. In his later discussion of autobiography, though, we find that thoughts can be expressed in the agent's flow of consciousness^{56a}. He even discusses thinking itself as a form of activity. If such forms of reflection are action, and action must be the "unity of the inside and outside of an event"⁵⁷, then we are left with the somewhat paradoxical situation of an action's outside being entirely inside.

Some sharpening of his metaphor is plainly necessary. W.H. Dray's discussion of Collingwoodian understanding indicates one way of interpreting this metaphor which has the virtue of making clear a very practical problem facing historians. Rather than narrowly defining "outside" as physical movement, it should be redefined as "whatever event expresses a thought". The "inside" thus becomes "whatever thought is expressed"⁵⁸. This revised view allows for the all too frequent incompleteness of the available historical data. Many

relevant, interesting and historically significant thoughts are not expressed in any discernable form. When, for instance, did Richard III decide to seize the throne of England? Whatever date the historian chooses will have a tremendous influence on his interpretations of Richard's actions prior to the usurpation. The historian will, however, have no direct evidence in the form of outright expressions of Richard's decision. In those troubled times, Richard wisely kept his own counsel in matters of high treason.

Nonetheless, Collingwood does make a point. An object of historical inquiry is thought, for it is necessary to explain an agent's action. History is thus distinguished from natural science, and disciplinary autonomy is achieved. However, two very significant questions remain about this object of inquiry. Is thought, as Collingwood claims, the sole object of historical inquiry? or is it both necessary and sufficient for explanation? Also, how are we to discover what the thoughts actually were of a man who lived and died hundreds of years ago?

Collingwood's position on the primacy of thought is clear. "At bottom [the historian] is concerned with thoughts alone; with their outward expression in events he is concerned only by the way, in so far as these reveal to him the thoughts of which he is in search."⁵⁹ . He is quite consistent in maintaining this position throughout the *Epilegomena*. In connection with it he makes one of his best-known statements about history, a claim so bold that it has about it an air of paradox.

Collingwood claims that "when [the historian] knows what happened, he already knows why it happened"⁶⁰ . This seems somewhat implausible at first glance, for any student of history can recall knowing what happened in a certain historical drama without knowing why. While it may on occasion happen

that the evidence establishing that an event happened also gives an indication why, it is clear that this is not necessarily so. History books are full of actions that undoubtedly occurred, but without anyone having any conclusive evidence on why they were done.

The paradox can be recast in light of Collingwood's theory of what it is to fully know an historical action. One does not really know what an action was until one has discovered its inner, thought-side. It is this thought-side that allows full explanation, or answers the question "why?". By the time an historian has fully described an action, then, he has also explained it. An action, fully conceived, is self-explanatory.

However, Collingwood's paradox breaks down when placed in the context of his argument on the two-dimensionality of action. In reading that when an historian knows what happened, he already knows why it happened, we assume that the "what" and the "it" refer to the same thing. To apply Collingwood's example to the paradox, when the historian knows that Caesar crossed the Rubicon, he already knows why Caesar crossed the Rubicon. This is not necessarily so. However, if "it" refers to the outside of the action, and "what" to its inside, then the paradox makes sense. In other words, when the historian knows that Caesar was defying Republican law, he already knows why Caesar crossed the Rubicon. This is no longer a paradox, because the paradox rests on equivocating "what" and "it".⁶¹

It may also no longer be an answer to the question "why?". Answering such questions seems to require a distinction between what is explained and what explains it. What needs explanation, no doubt, is action. Actions have a thought-side. When this thought-side is discovered, it is part of the action which must be explained; it part of what needs explaining, so how can it be

explanatory? Collingwood attempts to collapse this distinction between what is explained and what does the explaining with his paradox, but it is by no means clear that thought is self-explanatory. It may always be asked of a thought, but why did he think that?

How does this bear on thought as the object of historical inquiry? Collingwood's statement stands revealed as an overstatement of an important truth. Historians do need to be concerned with the thought of the agent. However, to fully explain an action, the historian must put it into the context of earlier and later events, for only in this way can a full account of its causes be given and its significance be determined. In addition to his motives, a full account of why Caesar crossed the Rubicon includes an account of the events that put him, so to speak, on the banks of the Rubicon. Thought is a necessary but not sufficient condition of historical explanation.

Despite these caveats, though, Collingwood's point again comes through. The historian must be concerned with thought. How, then, is he to discover these thoughts? He appears to give an answer to this question in "The Science of Human Nature". Collingwood asks "But how does the historian discern the thoughts which he is trying to discover?" and replies "There is only one way in which it can be done: by rethinking them in his own mind."⁶²

This is one aspect of the famous re-enactment doctrine. Although this statement takes the form of a methodological prescription, a different interpretation becomes necessary when it is placed in the context of two other sections of the Epilegomena. In "History as Re-enactment of Past Experience" and "The Historical Imagination", the re-enactment doctrine is presented as the criterion of truth in historical inquiry; as its goal, not its method.

Collingwood's historical method is explicitly presented in "Historical

Evidence". It begins with the discussion, already examined, of the inferential, systematic nature of all sciences. A question remains: What is the proper form of inference for an historian to use? How should he reason, and what should he reason from? Collingwood approaches this negatively, by rejecting one method, then positively, by outlining his own. Throughout, his concern is to make the historian autonomous.

The method he rejects has already been alluded to in his historical inquiry. Here, he labels it scissors-and-paste history. It is predicated on the testimony of authorities, which the historian assembles or collates in the course of his work, hence the term "scissors-and-paste". The scissors-and-paste historian has given up his autonomy, for he depends on this testimony. He accepts the ready-made answers of his authorities as sufficient to satisfy his historical inquiries.

Straightforward scissors-and-paste was the historical method of the Middle Ages, but was supplanted by critical scissors-and-paste, which examined authorities critically to determine their credibility. This critical history was not yet autonomous either, for a statement was either incorporated into the history or discarded. The historian still accepted ready-made answers, after scrutiny to be sure, but this was merely a refinement of the old method. The question asked about evidence was whether it was true or false, not what it meant. According to Collingwood, this second question is the important one, and is the key to doing history⁶³.

Finally, Collingwood rejects as mere pigeon-holing the "scientific histories" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including those of Toynbee and Spengler. These positivist histories, besides their weaknesses already discussed in the historical inquiry, made no advancement in methods for

ascertaining historical facts. They merely took scissors-and-paste "facts" and attempted to extrapolate from them.

What, then, does Collingwood demand of historians? Obviously, the historian must be more than a mere recorder or chronicler. He must be a theorist who can go beyond what is given him and construct a theory that supplements and explains the available evidence⁶⁴. He must be able to find more than is simply handed him by his sources. This part of what it means to be autonomous, "where by autonomy [Collingwood] means the condition of being one's own authority, making statements or taking actions on one's own initiative and not because those statements or actions are authorized or prescribed by someone else"⁶⁵.

Thus, for Collingwood, "history so far from depending on⁶⁶ testimony therefore has no relation with testimony at all"

He claims to have devised a method for doing history that will meet all of these conditions, and make the historian independent of both authorities and testimony. One hardly needs to point out the radical nature of his claim, for how else is the historian to study the past than by relying on the recorded testimony of the times?

He first presents his method by way of an example, a stylized detective story called "Who Killed John Doe?", in which he purports to illustrate a paradigm of autonomous thinking. Briefly, John Doe was killed by his neighbor the rector, who he was blackmailing. The rector's daughter confesses to the crime. Her young man had been staying with them the night of the crime. The detective assumes she is trying to protect him. Her young man had in fact been out in the middle of the night in question, but refused to say why because he was protecting the rector. The detective finally identifies the murderer largely by way of physical evidence like ashes in the dustbin and paint smears on a cler-

ical jacket recently donated to charity. ⁶⁷

Collingwood is attempting to illustrate autonomous reasoning that does not "logically depend on...statements made by other persons" ⁶⁸. This is simply not the case. Some testimony, including that of a maid to the effect that the young man's shoes were muddy, simply accepted. Further, there is much material in the story that is testimony-contaminated, such as the blithely stated proposition that "John Doe is a blackmailer", or that the glove buttons found in the dustbin were from "a famous glovemaking in Oxford Street whom the rector always patronized."

Finally, of course, there is a fundamental difference in the situation facing our detective and the conditions under which an historian must operate. The detective's investigation is fairly contemporaneous with the events that he is studying. Much of the evidence he relies on in the story simply would not be directly available to the historian. Collingwood emphasizes the role played by the detective's own observations in making his thinking autonomous, for example, "John Doe was lying across his desk with a dagger in his back...". Much that is contained in these observations could only be available to the historian through testimony, which is precisely what Collingwood wants to avoid.

Clearly, then, Collingwood's example is not illustrative. What of his method, as he later outlines it? It revolves around asking question. To paraphrase Sir Francis Bacon, the historian must put his authorities to the question, and "this questioning activity if the dominant factor in history" ⁶⁹.

These questions are put by the historian to himself, so that every step in his inference is driven by a question. A brief illustration may be made using the confession of the rector's daughter. Is she telling the truth? Probably not, as she has neither the strength to stab someone of the anatomical

knowledge to make such an efficient job of it, and if she did, she would scarcely rush in and accuse herself. Why is she lying? To protect someone. Who? Who does she suspect? Her Young man? He was there, and capable of it. By pursuing this sort of internal dialogue, a more complete picture of events can be constructed than is contained on the face of the evidence.

How does this establish autonomy? The questioner is no longer relying on statements made by others as evidence. His conclusions are drawn, not from these ready-made statements, Collingwood tells us, but from his own, autonomous statement that " I am now reading or hearing a statement to such-and-such effect" ⁷⁰

This mechanical shortcut to autonomy is plainly inadequate. A scissors-and-paste historian could achieve such autonomous statements with no real change in his method; he would only have to be a little more longwinded. As has been observed, "whatever makes propositions useful as premisses within an inquiry, it is not the mere fact that the inquirer can state that he has heard ⁷¹ them uttered or seen them written"

Collingwood's attempt to achieve absolute freedom from reliance on testimony fails. We must always rely on it at some level. How are we to know that Caesar crossed the Rubicon unless someones testifies to it? Even if we deny the validity of that testimony, the grounds that we deny it on will be, at the least, testimony-contaminated. For instance, one such ground might be that our original authority was an enemy of Caesar's. How are we to know this, unless someone has either testified to it directly, or testified about actions from which it can be inferred?

Our original desire to know how to discover the thoughts of historical agents is also apparently unsatisfied. It is true that Collingwood has given

us no magical formula for discovering these thoughts. What he does give us is a method that will enable us to gain a fuller picture of past actions. This picture will be complete enough to enable us, some of the time at least, to re-enact those past events, see them from the agent's point of view, and thus re-think the thought of the agent. This is the goal of the historian, and the source of the criterion for historical truth. Collingwood claims that it is, ultimately, the source of the historian's autonomy.

How can this re-enactment or rethinking of past events or thoughts give autonomy to an historian? Collingwood presents his answer in "The Historical Imagination" by trying to find an autonomous criterion of historical truth. He begins, as usual, by rejecting several proposed criteria. Truth cannot be established by the agreement between the historian's statements and those of his authorities, for against what do we check the authorities' statements? The point of application of the criterion is merely pushed back one step. Neither can it be established by the historian's experience of the world, that tells him that some kinds of things happen and some do not, for much fiction could pass for history under this criterion.

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What the historian is doing is inferring from his evidence, to go beyond it or inside of it. This is both a critical and constructive activity. It is constructive because it aims at creating a more complete picture by interpolating the events and thoughts that must have occurred by are not explicitly contained in the evidence. He must use his imagination to fill in the gaps in the historical narrative. This imagination is an essential part of historical inference.

Collingwood is careful to emphasize that because his historical imagination is directed at the past and guided by evidence, it is not mere arbitrary

fancy. However, to think for history as "a web of reconstruction pegged down, so ^{to} speak, to the facts by the statements of authorities" is to beg the question of historical truth, for it falls back on an already rejected criterion of truth. Collingwood is thus driven to conclude that for ⁷³ "historical thought there are properly speaking no data" .

Collingwood claims that the historian's picture of the past, his re-enactment of it or his web of imaginative construction, serves as the criterion of historical truth. It is entirely the historian's own product, and so with it he achieves autonomy. But can this criterion actually separate fact from fancy? It is, after all, wholly a product of imagination. Indeed, Collingwood himself makes analogies between the work of the historian and the novelist. They diverge, though, because "the historian's picture stands in a ⁷⁴ peculiar relation to something called evidence" . What is this peculiar relation, since Collingwood has earlier ⁷⁵ stated that this picture justifies the sources used in its construction? This web of reconstruction "actually ⁷⁶ serves as the touchstone by which we decide whether alleged facts are genuine" . This is a peculiar relation indeed. Under this view, an historian is justified in rejecting evidence that contradicts his theory. If it does not fit into his imaginative picture, it is false or spurious.

Collingwood's search for autonomy has carried him far afield, as the historian is made successively independent of authorities, testimony, and finally evidence and data. The underlying flaw in Collingwood's philosophical search for autonomy is that he aimed too high, for a theoretically pure autonomy, in which the historian was entirely self-contained. ✓

Conclusion

The idea of history passed through four fairly distinct stages in its development from Herodotus to Croce and Collingwood. It began in Classical Greece with Herodotus's scientific yet limited history of recent events. Unfortunately, though the idea of history was clear in Herodotus's mind, the substantialism of Platonist Greek thought denied it a chance at wider acceptance. The second stage was marked by the elimination of the substantialist theoretical underpinnings in favor of more useful Christian ideas. Medieval Christianity also eliminated both the critical attitude and the humanist orientation necessary for fully-rounded history. The rise of natural science brought with it a secularism that restored humanism and a certain critical method to history while retaining the theoretical advances of medieval thought. Again, though, this advance came at a price. In asserting their claim to knowledge, the scientists claimed that theirs was the only way to knowledge. It was not until the late nineteenth century that this final roadblock was removed and an autonomous idea of history was fully articulated and defended by Croce.

In his philosophical inquiry, Collingwood takes up where Croce left off. He builds on Croce's idea of history as autonomous and distinct from the natural sciences due to its unique subject-matter. Collingwood elaborates on this thesis by arguing that historical action must be explained by reference to the thought of the agent. He loses perspective, though, in his account of the unique features of history, and claims that thought is sufficient for historical explanation. This is little more than an error of emphasis, and easily remedied. He goes more fundamentally astray in his pursuit of

autonomy for the historian. His concept of autonomy is ~~perhaps~~ too pure to apply to men working in the human, as opposed to natural, sciences. He attempts to make the historian entirely independent, ultimately even of data, and as a result makes him self-contained and independent of external influences, like evidence.

A yearning for the abstract, theoretically pure is at the root of Collingwood's most serious flaws. It is revealed in his historical inquiry by his desire for an unbroken progress from historical ignorance to enlightenment. His fully-fledged, autonomous historian is held to an impossible high standard, quite impractical for the day-to-day realities of discovering and writing about the past.

Without doubt, though, Collingwood's exploration of the practice of history, past and present, is a remarkable achievement. If occasional omissions do occur, the advance of historical thought over two and a half millennia is well illustrated and its contemporary failings are strongly criticized. His program and methods, though carried too far, contain much that is worthwhile, even if only as a foil against which the reflective historian can sharpen his own methods and test his assumptions. As subsequent academic discussion has proven, Collingwood's book has earned a place in the continuing development of the idea of history. Though he may not have the final answer, Collingwood does ask some interesting questions.

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